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# ADVISORY COUNCIL HANDBOOK

BULGARIAN AGENCY FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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# ADVISORY COUNCIL HANDBOOK

## BULGARIAN AGENCY FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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**Sources:** Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Agency, Bulgaria  
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MANAGEMENT  
SYSTEMS

# ABOUT THE HANDBOOK

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This Handbook is a practical guide to assist the national and regional *Advisory Councils* of the **Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Agency (BSMEPA)** with their mission and work.

The *Advisory Council* has the opportunity to positively improve the SME environment or it may flounder on a path that does not achieve notable results. The most important work of any council is to understand why it exists and what it must do to make a tangible difference in society. Unfortunately, sometimes councils become so engrossed in doing an endless variety of unfocused tasks, that they lose sight of the results they have to achieve.

Use this handbook as a tool, not a dictate. It contains simple advice on how to formulate the council's broader vision and priorities, how to sustain interest among members, how to host meetings with results, how to think about and document strategies, and other useful ideas that will keep the council's work meaningful and focused.

The handbook is written to simultaneously 1) assist BSMEPA in managing the Council and 2) provide council members with the strategic means to be successful participants. Feel free to take notes on it, copy it, or even tear it apart....use the worksheets to clarify and expand on strategy.....use other content as a basis for debate and analysis; consider the handbook a working document, not something that is static nor perfect.

The binder format allows the user to add material, like the government's recent 5-year SME Strategy. Also, when information becomes obsolete, it may easily be removed.

## I. What is the BSMEPA Advisory Council?

- The BSMEPA Advisory Council is a legally mandated 16 member state-public advisory body chaired by the Chairperson of the BSMEPA.
- It is committed to and recognizes the importance of SMEs in the economic and social development of the nation.
- It provides, *in good faith*, advice and recommendations on policy, program and administrative issues to BSMEPA and the government.
- It creates a recognized protocol for its voted decisions to be presented to the public and the government.
- It works in a timely and diligent manner.

What else?

## II. Keys To Advisory Council Success

The success of the Advisory Council depends on a mutual belief that all members can positively impact the programs and policies affecting small and medium enterprises. No one wants to invest their time in an effort that lacks identifiable results.

To achieve success requires the commitment, leadership and organization that will motivate members' active participation. Here are some important attributes to make sure that the Advisory Council works like members want it to:

- **Committed Members:** Include people who want to make a difference in their community; usually these individuals own a small enterprise or are members of SME advocacy organizations (chambers, associations, planning boards, local government).
- **BSMEPA Leadership:** Establish expectations that the host organization (BSMEPA) organizes and documents the meetings and creates an open, professional atmosphere for the council to be successful.
- **Strong Chairperson:** Support the Chairperson so he/she can effectively manage the meeting, facilitate open communication, and commit to timely follow-up on tasks and recommendations.
- **Meaningful Work:** Provide members with a clear set of expectations, challenging tasks and sufficient information to carry out their missions.
- **Enjoyable Meetings:** Maintain a professional environment that makes good use of time and balances serious discussion with some socialization.
- **Access to Influence:** Arrange occasional meetings with the Office of the President and the Prime Minister.

Other keys?

### III. How Can the BSMEPA Empower the Advisory Council?

Keeping Council members motivated will ensure their on-going participation. If members are attending meetings only because they have been told to do so, then their value to the Council will be significantly diminished. The best members are those that are self-motivated because they believe in what they are doing.

The BSMEPA can empower members by promoting an open environment for recognition and communication:

- Grant formal recognition of new council members by a high-ranking government official.
- Keep council members informed by sending policy bulletins and other forms of communication between meetings.
- Provide members with opportunities to participate and become involved, including lobby efforts, program promotion, access to Parliament and policy input.
- Maximize members' areas of expertise and interest; encourage the creation of specialized councils for specific topics that require focused analysis.
- Make council members feel special by taking time to thank them for their work and by establishing a ritual for recognizing achievements.
- Encourage members to prepare position papers on important topics of interest for the long-term prosperity of SMEs.

Other empowerment strategies?

## IV. Advisory Council Meeting Agenda

The Advisory Council has the opportunity to work with different policy issues and programs that may significantly impact Bulgarian SMEs today and into the future. Members must decide which topics interest them and are the most important for the council to address. The council should *strategically* chose those areas it will focus upon during the coming year, while recognizing that some issues will warrant an ad-hoc 'immediate' solution because of third-party imposed deadlines (government agencies, Parliament, donors).

The actual agenda of Advisory Council meetings will vary depending on which issue is being addressed. If, for example, the Council is reviewing a new tax proposal, staff members from the Ministry of Finance and the IMF may be present to solicit direct input from the Council. If, in another meeting the council is preparing a position advocating guaranteed loan funds, an international donor and a private sector bank may be invited to describe their technical requirements. Other meetings will not require the attendance of experts and the Council's work may be better accomplished without outside advice.

The Council has the right to focus on any issue pertinent to SMEs, and to invite anyone to the meetings who potentially will provide it with the information necessary to make sound decisions. But the Council should chose its causes and guests with discretion. Do not engage issues and activities that could better be resolved by other institutions, or that do not have the potential to have positive impact on the SME sector.

During most meetings, the Advisory Council will be engaging one or more of the following activities:

- Recommending policy solutions and improvements for SME investment and growth.
- Presenting SME problems (especially related to taxation, regulations/licensing) to the BSMEPA, other agencies and elected officials.
- Interacting with elected officials, donors, agency representatives and other BSMEPA stakeholders on how to create an open, competitive entrepreneurial environment.
- Analyzing external SME data (needs analysis) to determine future program goals for the BSMEPA.
- Soliciting input from staff on specific BSMEPA program needs and ideas.
- Hearing from SME constituents about current government policy.

- Preparing the BSMEPA Annual Report and a council strategic plan

Other agenda ideas?



## V. Successful Advisory Council Meetings

A good and productive Advisory Council meeting requires concentration and focus, some active listening and the ability to encourage participation by all members.

Many of us complain about attending too many meetings, often leaving them with an air of frustration, a feeling that there was too much petty sniping and dissention and not enough accomplishment. It doesn't have to be this way. A meeting can be energizing, with Council members feeling good about themselves and each other, knowing that they are accomplishing specific goals.

It doesn't require magic or genius or even charisma to hold a productive meeting. It does require focus and discipline and a keen sensitivity to communications and group dynamics.

The following tasks are mutually performed by BSMEPA and the Advisory Council to guarantee the most productive meetings possible:

- *Prepare clear objectives in advance.*
- *Write a specific agenda that includes:*
  - Topic(s) for discussion
  - Presenter or discussion leader for each topic
  - Time allotment for each topic
- *Circulate to all members the following information prior to the meeting:*
  - Meeting agenda
  - Location/date/time
  - Background information/data
  - Any assigned items for member preparation
- *Council members must:*
  - Arrive on time
  - Be well prepared for agreed upon topic(s)
  - Be concise and to the point
  - Participate in a constructive manner
- *Record meeting minutes, post them on BSMEPA web site and prepare press release.*
- *Document assigned action items and ensure BSMEPA provides follow-up on the completion of all items.*
- *Review meeting effectiveness and apply suggested improvements at the next meeting.*
- *Do not hesitate to invite a neutral facilitator to sensitive meetings.*

## VI. Advisory Council Meeting Outline

**Pre-Meeting:** Pass out any handouts/materials; check logistics.

1. Welcome and Opening Statement: 5 minutes

(the opening should be read by the Chairperson)

2. **Update from previous meeting:** focus on progress and obstacles 5-20 minutes

What has happened with various tasks assigned to BSMEPA and ADVISORY COUNCIL members since the last meeting? (Chairperson goes first.)

3. **Introduce the Agenda:** 5 minutes

Present the Agenda and introduce any guests.

4. **Conduct the Agenda:** 30-45-60 minutes

5. **Meeting Review and Homework:** 15 minutes

(a) What was accomplished this meeting,

(b) Assign tasks;

(c) Discuss next meetings agenda;

(Chairperson summarizes the whole meeting)

6. **Socializing:** 10 minutes

Announcements; exchange of phone numbers/business cards;

Total Meeting Time: 90-120 minutes

**Note:** For a 60-minute meeting, each section of the meeting is proportionally shorter.

Other meeting items?

## Advisory Council Meeting Worksheet

1) Welcome and Opening Statement:	4) Conduct the agenda:
2) Update from previous meeting:	5) Meeting review:
3) Introduce the agenda:	6) Assigned homework and closure:

**Speakers and contacts:**

## VII. Advisory Council Strategic Planning

Strategy is essentially the maximizing of the Advisory Council's and each member's individual competence over time and resources. Strategy is a means by which people may contribute to the results, and while doing so, learn from one another. The Advisory Council should not be dominated by one or two members or agendas.

Goal-setting can be a time for renewing the Council, affirming a vision, coming together around a common purpose...creating aspirations that if realized advance the BSMEPA and the Advisory Council toward a shared vision for Bulgaria's small and medium enterprises.

The attached strategy worksheets and definitions provide a simple approach for working together using common terms and methodology. Strategic planning for the Council should not become a complex exercise that "must be done". Rather, it must remain a real and engaging process.

The Council must decide how many strategies and tactics it wants to tackle for the coming year. It should not embrace more than it can realistically accomplish; planning is not about quantity, but quality.

Members must perceive that they are part of a process that will be valuable, but at the same time not overwhelming.

**BSMEPA's five-year plan and annual report may be used as general strategic roadmaps.**

Other thoughts about the strategy?

## VIII. Advisory Council Strategic Planning Definitions

**Mission:** A specific, simple statement about why the Advisory Council exists and what it wants to do.

**Vision:** An articulated view of an improved environment for small and medium enterprises in Bulgaria and the Advisory Council's role in its creation. A vision by its very nature is idealistic and continually pursued yet possibly never achieved. In the mere discussion of a vision, much good is achieved; primarily defining what you stand for as a group.

**Strategy:** The Advisory Council's broad statement of intent. An advancement toward the vision, a celebration of hard work tangibly realized. This improvement, for example, may be for the sake of changing unfair tax code or it may be to improve the general public's perception of SMEs as a viable source of jobs and economic health.

**Priority:** The process for working together. A statement of direction to achieve the goal that should include desired outcomes. It is the specific work that defines who you are, together... ...organizationally as an Advisory Council.

**Action:** Individual action steps taken to achieve the strategy; a statement of responsibility with an outcome that is identifiable or measurable.

Notes on definitions:

## *Advisory Council Mission Statement for 200\_\_*

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## *Advisory Council Priorities for 200\_\_*

1) \_\_\_\_\_

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2) \_\_\_\_\_

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3) \_\_\_\_\_

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4) \_\_\_\_\_

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5) \_\_\_\_\_

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Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Advisory Council Strategy Worksheet

Strategy:

Priority:

Actions	Member(s)	Date(*)

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Terms:

**Strategy:** Advisory Council's broad statement of intent.

**Priority:** Statement of direction to achieve the strategy; should include desired outcomes.

**Actions:** Individual tasks taken to achieve the priority; outcome is identifiable and/or measurable.

(\*) Completion Date

# Advisory Council Strategy Worksheet

Strategy:

Priority:

Actions	Member(s)	Date(*)

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Advisory Council Strategy Worksheet

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# Advisory Council Strategy Worksheet

Strategy:

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Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Appendix 1. Working with the Media

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To affirm open public communication, the Advisory Council should pay special attention to media relations. The parameters of the Council's media policy and its implementation will be the exclusive responsibility of the BSMEPA. The BSMEPA public relations officer and respective administrative staff will also perform any necessary logistics to ensure broad media coverage.

- *Press releases* should be prepared after Council meetings for media distribution and BSMEPA web site placement (See press release format at the end of the section). While drafting the press release be aware that the Council does not represent the official opinion of the BSMEPA but its own position as a state-public advisory body.
- *Press conferences* can be held when matters of importance impacting many constituents are being discussed during Council meetings. But remember that press conferences need to be justified. The determining factor will be to give reporters the opportunity to ask questions and pursue a story rather than simply issuing a statement or making an announcement.
- *Interviews* - Attempt to get some of the council members on live TV and radio talk programs and be interviewed for print media to discuss important issues for keeping the momentum of the news event going.
- The Council can *support the public education undertakings* (e.g. holding of seminars, production of educational posters, brochures, radio and TV series, etc.) by providing technical advice and expert opinion.

Once interaction with the media begins, try to stick to the following *guidelines for talking to the media*:

- Prepare for the interview/the press conference – remember: if you fail to prepare, prepare to fail! Anticipate difficult questions and prepare to give positive responses.
- Develop a clear, concise message for the news conference. Coordinate with other speakers, to ensure messages are complimentary
- Write your message early and often. Keep your answers short and always stay on message
- Humanize your answers and avoid professional jargon; don't use bureaucratic language. Metaphors and analogies work wonders: provide comparisons and examples that bring facts and figures to life.

Talk from the viewpoint of the public's interest, not the Councils'. Think how what you are saying relates to your audience.

- Always answer the question: answer honestly and never lie. If you do not respond, you will seem evasive and give the impression you're hiding something. If you happen not to know the answer to a question, you can simply say: "I don't know, but I'll get the answer for you." And keep that promise by getting back to the reporter.
- If you do not want some statement quoted, do not make it. You should not talk "off the record", because such statements might easily end up published.
- Summarize key points you want your audience to remember
- Suggest next steps to be taken: by you/your organization and by your audience

## ***Writing a press release that works for you:***

Journalists are extremely busy people struggling with very tight deadlines, so when writing a press release try to make the “story” as easy to report as possible. Write short, simple sentences and keep paragraphs succinct. Here are six tried and successful press release rules:

- It should never be longer than a page and be written for the layman, not a college professor.
- Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These are the six questions that matter to a reporter and that should always be answered in the press release.
- Give the press release a headline that gets straight to the point. The headline should tell the reader immediately why this information is important.
- Make the most important points in the first sentence. The first paragraph of the press release is critical – it’s where all the information contained in the press release is summarized. Subsequent paragraphs could contain detailed data to be used as background and filler.
- Good quotes are useful and can give your press release a human touch. Opinions can be expressed through quotes. But do not overdo them – two is a reasonable number of quotes to be included.

The timing of a release is an important consideration. If you want to receive good coverage deliver the release early in the week and late morning (for the day). Same timing holds true for hosting a press conference.

# *Press Release Format*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **HEADLINE THAT GETS STRAIGHT TO THE POINT**

Short, snappy first sentence. Provide answers to "Wh"- questions filling up the first paragraph .....

.....  
.....

- Main
- Points
- Simply
- Expressed

Second paragraph – detailed information. ....

.....  
.....

"Effective use of quotes"

"Effective use of quotes"

For more information please contact: person's name \_\_\_\_\_ tel. number \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2. Advisory Council BSMEPA Assessment Interview

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1. Describe your primary reason(s) for serving on the Advisory Council. What is / are your specific area(s) of interest?
2. How would you articulate BSMEPA's mission?
3. What is the importance of BSMEPA's programs? Who do they serve?
4. Do you feel there is a consensus of agreement and everyone (staff/advisory council/donors/constituency/media/public) understands the purpose, vision, and programs of BSMEPA? If not, why not?
5. What is your perception of how BSMEPA is viewed by the local SME community? Regional and national peers and colleagues?
6. What do you believe are the responsibilities of being on the Advisory Council of a government agency?
7. Is the Advisory Council achieving these standards? If not, how can the Advisory Council better accomplish their primary responsibilities?
8. What are your three areas of greatest satisfaction with BSMEPA?
9. What do you see as the three to five most urgent concerns or challenges facing BSMEPA in the coming years?
10. What resources and expertise do you feel you can bring to BSMEPA? Historically, have they been utilized? If not, why not?
11. Do you have recommendations about BSMEPA's future directions and priorities?
12. Can you recommend three to five people who would make excellent council members?

Any other comments? Suggestions?

## Appendix 3. Sample Advisory Council Code of Ethics

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### Disclosure of information

A member must immediately notify the council of any change in circumstances that could result in a conflict of interest or appearance of a conflict of interest with BSMEPA.

The BSMEPA's legal counsel will decide whether the changed circumstances require BSMEPA to terminate the individual's membership on the council.

### Ethical guidelines

- (1) Members must not engage in conduct that calls their good character into serious doubt, or creates a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- (2) Members must make recommendations only to BSMEPA officials, other Government officials, specifically designated by statute. Member recommendations are only advisory and BSMEPA will decide how to respond to them.
- (3) Members may at times obtain confidential information about BSMEPA, other agencies, or confidential information about agencies' customers or resource partners because of their membership on an advisory council. Members must not disclose such information unless they request and receive permission to do so. Members must request permission from BSMEPA's legal counsel.
- (4) Members must not participate in, or make use of advisory council activities that directly affect their business or financial interests, unless the activities are available to the general public.
- (5) Members must not use their title and status as an BSMEPA advisory council member to apply for or get benefits that are not available to the general public.
- (6) Members must not use their title and status as a BSMEPA advisory council member to attempt to influence government officials at the national, regional or local level except as it relates to BSMEPA policy.
- (7) With limited exceptions, members may not advocate for or represent small businesses, state or local development companies, small business associations, or others, in making an application for BSMEPA contracts or assistance.
- (8) Members may not accept monetary or other forms of compensation or benefit for decisions they take in the capacity of an BSMEPA advisory council member;
- (9) Members may not individually represent, informally or formally, that they have the authority to commit the Advisory Council or BSMEPA to undertake any specific or general course of action.

### Acceptance of gratuitous services

An advisory council member may accept gratuitous educational or training services on behalf of an advisory council if:

- a. The person offering the services agrees, in advance, to provide the services without compensation; and
- b. BSMEPA concludes that the services being offered are beneficial to the advisory council.



# Appendix 4. Advisory Council Internal Rules

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## *Part I*

### *General Terms*

- Art. 1.** The Internal Rules provide for the activities of the Advisory Council for SMEs under the Chairperson of the Agency for SMEs, here and after called "Advisory Council".
- Art. 2.** The Council is a public private advisory organ under the chairperson of the Agency for SMEs that helps the chairperson implement policy for the promotion of start up and development of SMEs.

## *Part II*

### *Structure and functions of the Advisory Council*

- Art. 3.** (1). The Advisory Council is composed of a Chairperson and 16 members determined by Art. 11, point 2 of the SME Act.  
(2). The chairperson of the Advisory Council is the chairperson of the Agency for SMEs.  
(3). The chairperson of the Advisory Council can invite to the meetings of the Advisory Council representatives of government and non-government organizations and bodies related to the SMEs.
- Art. 4.** (1) The Advisory Council
1. discusses the condition and policy for the promotion of start up and development of SMEs and gives suggestions for the expected priorities and trends for the current year;
  2. discusses the survey results for the SME condition and development by regions and branches and gives suggestions in the preparation of the annual report for SMEs under Art. 6 of the SME Act;
  3. suggests improvements of the legislative framework for SMEs;
  4. acts as a conduit to public access to information about the legislative initiatives and participation of the entrepreneurs and their unions in the discussion of laws and regulations;
  5. adopts an annual plan for its activities;
- (2). The Advisory Council can create as needed temporary or permanent expert groups for specific issues of its competence.

## *Part III*

### *Organization of the activities of the Advisory Council*

- Art. 5.** (1) The Advisory Council holds meetings at least once every three months according to the adopted annual plan.  
(2) Additional meetings can be held when necessary.  
(3) Meetings are held at the request of the chairperson or at the request of at least half of the members.

- Art. 6.** (1). The chairperson sends the draft agenda and materials for the meeting to the members of the Advisory Council at least 5 working days prior to the meeting.  
(2). Each member of the Advisory Council can make suggestions for additional agenda topics no later than 3 working days prior to the meeting. In this case the suggestion is sent to the chairperson and all members.  
(3). The AC adopts the agenda at the beginning of each meeting.
- Art. 7.** (1). The meetings are deemed valid if more than half of the members are present.  
(2). For each meeting of the Advisory Council minutes are prepared and signed by the chairperson and the secretary. The documents and materials reviewed during the meeting are attached to the minutes.  
(3). The members of the Advisory Council can attach to their individual concerns, any specific issues discussed and the decisions taken to the minutes.
- Art. 8.** (1). The decisions of the Advisory Council are taken with open vote and a majority of at least half of the present members of the Advisory Council.
- Art. 9.** The chairperson of the Advisory Council:  
(1). proposes the agenda, convenes and conducts the meetings of the Advisory Council;  
(2). submits for discussion the draft annual report on the condition and development of SMEs;  
(3). organizes and ensures the implementation of the decisions taken by the Advisory Council;  
(4). issues orders about the composition and the goals of any temporary or permanent expert group created by the Advisory Council;  
(5). Designates by order the secretary to the Advisory Council and his/her goals;  
(6). suggests to the organs and organizations represented in the Advisory Council to nominate a new representative whenever a current representative is released under Art. 11, point 1 of The Internal Rules;
- Art. 10.** The members of the Advisory Council:  
1. participate in person in the meetings;  
2. can make suggestions for the meeting agenda of the Advisory Council;  
3. present the opinions of the organizations they represent on the agenda topics;  
4. submit for discussion by the Advisory Council those issues connected to the organizations they represent which may have an effect on the SME sector;  
5. have the right to access the protocols and materials kept by the Advisory Council;  
6. have the right to receive regular information about all the decisions, events and meetings connected to the work of the Agency;
- Art. 11.** (1) The members of the Advisory Council are dismissed by the Council of Ministers:  
1. at their own request;  
2. when they are not able to perform their duties in the period of more than 6 months;  
3. when absent more than two meetings of the Advisory Council without a good reason;  
4. in the case of a felony conviction;  
5. in the case of dismissal from duty or when the member is no longer a representative of the respective organization under Art. 11, point 2 of the SME Act;  
6. in the case of death or being in prison;  
(2). When one of the events from point 1 occur, the chairperson submits the suggestion for dismissal of the respective Advisory Council member to the Council of Ministers at the formal procedure.

- Art. 12.** (1). A secretary assists the activities of the chairperson.  
(2). The organizational and technical assistance of the activities of the Advisory Council is provided by the administration of the Agency for SMEs.

### **Concluding regulation**

The Internal Rules are adopted according to Art. 11, point 4 of the SME Act.

**Recommended changes:**

## Appendix 5. Law for SMEs (Excerpts)

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### Article 11 Membership Requirements

The Council of Ministers shall appoint the Council as nominated by:

- Ministries--4
- National Association of Municipalities-2
- Advocacy groups (assoc, chambers..)-9
- Promotional/Encouragement Bank JSC-1

Recommended changes:

### Article 12 Council Mission

- Deliberate on current BSMEPA activity that promotes and develops the SME sector, and propose priorities for the coming year.
- Analyze the current status and impact of SMEs in the Bulgarian economy and contribute to the preparation of the annual report.
- Make proposals for improving the regulatory framework that impacts the socio-economic life of SMEs.
- Secure public access to information about legislative initiatives and the participation of entrepreneurs and their advocacy groups in the discussion of draft laws and other legal instruments.

Recommended changes:

## CURRENT ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS 200\_\_

[illegible]